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The Proposed Lincoln National Memorial



THE selection of a site for the Lincoln Memorial at Washington is a question which is receiving attention throughout the United States. Congress has appropriated the sum of two million dollars, the largest amount ever authorized in this country for such a purpose, and has appointed a committee, known as the Lincoln Memorial Commission, to report on a suitable architectural design for the memorial, as well as a suitable location. This commission, composed of President Taft (its chairman), Senator Shelby M. Cullum, Senator George Peckahy Wetmore, Senator Herman D. Moody, Speaker Champ Clark, Representative Samuel Walker McCall, and former Speaker Joseph G. Cannon, appointed an art commission to report on the various suggested sites and upon an architect. The art committee is made up of D. A. Barnum, Thomas Hastings, Daniel C. French, Charles Moore, and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.

The Putnam Park site was first officially brought up in 1901, when the art commission, composed of practically the same members as at present, presented a report to Congress advocating a general improvement scheme for the capital. The main feature of this scheme was to be a great mall leading from the Capitol to the Potomac. On either side of this mall would be government buildings, with the Washington Monument in the architectural center. Close to the Washington memorial, between it and the Potomac, it was planned to erect a monument to bear the name of Lincoln. A memorial to Lincoln, if placed here, would be on low ground and under the shadow of the Washington Monument. Although a higher and more important site for the Lincoln Memorial is generally desired by those in close touch with the situation, the Memorial Commission seems to be influenced to a certain extent by the art commission's recommendation, as evidenced by the publication of Mr. Bacon's designs alone.

In the opinion of many who have given close study to the question, the consideration of the Meridian Hill and the Soldiers' Home sites should have first place in the deliberations of the Congressional commission. To give an adequate impression of what these two sites really mean, one can scarcely do better than quote from the report submitted to the Lincoln Memorial Commission by Mr. John R. Pope.

"The city of Washington," he says, "has two dominating, ever-present vital features. They express her purpose and her ideals. They are carved in the minds of all men and are a constant educational and moral factor among them. They are the dome of the Capitol and the monument to Washington."

"Elevation has always added dignity, grandeur, and loftiness of purpose to beauty, the vital element in these two monuments is that they rise above us. The Capitol is on an elevation eighty-eight feet above the Potomac and its dome begins its rise one hundred feet above. The crest of Meridian Hill has an elevation of one hundred and eighty-five feet, or is approximately one hundred feet above the Capitol site. The crest of the hill on the axis of North Capitol Street in the Soldiers' Home grounds has an elevation of two hundred and ten feet, or approximately one hundred and thirty feet higher than the site of the Capitol."

"The Meridian Hill site and the Soldiers' Home grounds site are on main axes of the city plan. They are suitably situated for monuments of the first order."



The proposed site for the monument on Meridian Hill, seen from the south

Both sites possess qualities absolutely necessary to an unhampered expression of purpose in the monuments on them, by reason of their independence of surrounding important architectural dictates, considerations, or comparisons.

"The Soldiers' Home Grounds site possesses the grand qualities of isolation, of elevation, of unlimited area of beautifully treed parking, and of control of all surroundings offering it. It is not too remotely situated and is easy of access. It is in the author's opinion a location in the biggest, freest sense for a great memorial, and the finest in Washington for that purpose."

"The design for the Meridian Hill site memorial calls for the purchase of land and the raising of a building to the west of Sixteenth Street. It provides for a park 150 x 1,200 feet on the crest and slope of the hill. It diverts Sixteenth Street around this park and places the memorial in the center on the axis of Sixteenth Street."

"At the north and south ends of this park are open plazas the width of the park. From these plazas rise steps one hundred feet wide in terraces to a platform 100 x 200 feet at an elevation of two hundred and fifty feet, or well above the columns of the Capitol dome. On this platform is placed the figure of Lincoln. Around the figure stands a double rectangle of monumental sentinel columns measuring, with their entablatures and covering, sixty-four feet in height, each column measuring eight feet in diameter and forty feet in height."

Mr. Pope then describes the plan for the Soldiers' Home Grounds site: "On the axis of North Capitol Street, on the crest of the hill one thousand feet from

Michigan Avenue, and approached from it by a court four hundred feet wide, is placed a platform six hundred feet square. This platform rises on grass, or rises to a height above the adjoining trees. The platform has an elevation of two hundred and twenty-five feet, or is at a height well above the columns of the Capitol dome. In the center of this, and slightly raised above the terrace, stands the figure of Lincoln. Around him stand monumental sentinel columns in the form of an arcade three hundred and twenty feet in diameter, and with the entablature and attic measuring seventy feet in height."

"In this design, as well as in the other, there is an architectural feature, symbolical of governmental or other significance than that of homage as a setting to the figure of the man."

"The design calls for a suitable dedication over the main south columns, and provides a frieze on the inside of the court around the Lincoln statue for a record of his words."

Both of Mr. Pope's designs possess a distinction and a dignity worthy of their subject. In particular the design for the Soldiers' Home Grounds site memorial has a purity of conception that would make it appropriate for any location. Mr. Pope's attitude toward a memorial to Lincoln is somewhat different from Mr. Bacon's. Mr. Bacon envisions his statue within four walls—an object secluded and guarded. There seems to be a general sentiment among those interested in the problem that the public will be more in sympathy with Mr. Pope and his desire to show in the open his Lincoln, his free, great Lincoln, alone and dignified, as an example to all the people, for all the people.



The proposed site in the grounds of the Soldiers' Home, viewed from the south